

Story 964 (Dictated--
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The Wordless Letter

long cell
A man named Dursun from the town of Perşembe¹ was doing his military service at a small training area. Every day a great quantity of mail would arrive on that base for the soldiers. Most of this was made up of letters and cards from their relatives and friends. It seemed all the rest of the men received some mail of this kind, but Dursun never got any.

Now it happened that the base commander at that camp always read all the mail before it was distributed to the soldiers. It was a type of censorship, all right, but it was done for the welfare of that camp.--Suppose, for example, that a soldier received a letter saying that his father had died, or a letter saying that so-and-so was in trouble, or a letter saying that his wife had run off with another man. If such a thing should happen, the soldier might just away home to see what he might do to help the situation. The camp could not have that kind of behavior.

¹ Kaza town on the Black Sea coast in Ordu Province. The name means Thursday.

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Well, back to Dursun. One day he finally received a letter from home. The base commander opened the envelope and pulled out what he thought was a letter, but it turned out to be only a blank sheet of paper. There was not a thing written on it! It was completely blank on the front and completely blank on the back. The commander said to himself, "There is something suspicious about this letter!" He then tried in every way he knew to discover what the letter meant. Despite all his efforts, however, he was unable to solve this puzzle. He therefore called Dursun to his office and said to him, "Dursun, you have a letter. Here it is. Read it." Saying this, he handed Dursun the envelope.

"A letter!" Dursun exclaimed. "It is probably from my older brother." Removing the paper from the envelope, he looked at the front of it, but it was blank. He turned it over and looked at the back side, but there was nothing written there, either. Smiling to himself, he folded up the piece of paper and put it back in the envelope. Saying, "Thank you, sir," he saluted and started to leave.

"Dursun--wait!" said the commander. "I think that there is some kind of message in it. I suspect that your brother is telling you to come home. Or perhaps there is some kind of signal or code message for you. Anyway, read the letter aloud!"

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sir," said Dursun, "there is nothing on the paper in that envelope--nothing on one side and nothing on the other side. See!" As he said this, he removed the paper from the envelope again to show it to his commanding officer.

But the officer was not satisfied. He asked Dursun, "Why would your brother bother to send you nothing but a blank piece of paper? Why would he take the trouble to do that if there is no message upon it? Tell me!"

"Well, sir," said Dursun, "several years ago my brother and I had a quarrel--it was quite a serious quarrel--and since that time we have not spoken to each other. That's all there is to it. That is why he didn't say anything in the letter. We are still brothers, and we remember each other, but we just are not speaking to each other.

/Narrator: This tale does not end as effectively in English as it does in Turkish. There are both end rhyme and internal rhyme in the Turkish, and these cannot be reproduced very well in English.⁷ ²

² The inflected verb endings and the pattern of suffixes (in place of prepositions) combine to make Turkish much easier to rhyme than English is. Just ordinary conversation may, quite unintentionally, rhyme.